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ABSTRACT

A project aimed to identify the staff development needs of tutors involved in the OWTLET (Other Ways To Learn--Educational Technology) open learning scheme and to pilot supportive strategies. To ascertain a broad view of inservice tutor training requirements, the first phase of the project was devoted to a literature review, student and tutor questionnaires, visits to established open learning centers, and attendance at open learning workshops. Phase two comprised three strategies: modification of administrative procedures, a series of staff development meetings for tutors on five topics (learning materials; initial interview; maintaining contact; information, advice, and counseling; review and open forum), and preparation of three staff development units. The units, which covered 10 areas of guidance, were offered in open learning form. Appendix A contains the three units: The Concept of Open Learning, The Initial Meeting, and A Continuing Dialogue. Each unit consists of these components: aim and objectives, study guide, questions to guide reading and informative material, and a conclusion. Appendix B is a list of materials for further reading. (YLB)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR OPEN LEARNING TUTORS

A Summary

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PROJECT REPORT

STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR OPEN LEARNING TUTORS

An appraisal of staff development needs for the North Yorkshire Open Learning Scheme

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Harrogate College of Arts and Technology

Further Education Unit

Professional, Industrial and Commercial Updating

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Dear Sir/Madam,

STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR OPEN LEARNING TUTORS

Attached is a summary report of a project carried out at the Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies. Its aim was to identify the staff development needs of open learning tutors and to suggest how these needs might be met.

The vehicle chosen was the North Yorkshire Open Learning Scheme (OWTLET). In this way, both the tutors (responsible for the training) and the students (enrolled on the OWTLET scheme) experienced from different perspectives the demands of open learning. As the attached summary indicates, the project was formative: after phase one it was found necessary to maintain more regular contact with the students, change the fee-paying mechanism, review the learning materials and upgrade the training of the tutors themselves.

This mix of changes in organisation, development and learning strategies continued into the next phase of the project and, as paragraph 11 indicates, the resultant staff development units reflected these needs.

What seems to emerge from this study is that open learning tutors require special expertise in the timely selection of learning materials, in the timely intervention of face to face support and in maintaining effective contact with their students. None of this is surprising once teachers realise that open learning dispenses with the organisational stability of timetabled subjects and regular student attendance. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the additional support initially required by the open learning tutors was a greater understanding of the concept of open learning.

The staff development units developed in this project are described in Appendix A to this report. A limited number of copies of the full report are available from the FEU, on request.

This summary report is one of a number of publications now becoming available from FEU and others in the area of open learning. This demonstrates that valuable experience is now being gained and disseminated at an increasing rate - an indication perhaps that open learning is no longer just a fashion, but something more permanent.

Yours faithfully,

Jack Mansell

JACK MANSELL
Chief Officer

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
STRUCTURE OF THE OWTLET SCHEME	1
THE PROJECT - STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR OPEN LEARNING TUTORS	2
PHASE ONE	2
Literature review	2
Questionnaires and interviews	3
Visits and Workshops	3
RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING PHASE ONE	3
PHASE TWO	4
Modification of administrative proceedures	4
Tutor Meetings	4
Preparation of staff development units	6
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT	7

APPENDIX

A STAFF DEVELOPMENT UNITS	
UNIT ONE - THE CONCEPT OF OPEN LEARNING	9
UNIT TWO - THE INITIAL MEETING	33
UNIT THREE - A CONTINUING DIALOGUE	61
B FURTHER READING	95

INTRODUCTION

1. This summary report describes an FEU/PICKUP project on staff development for open learning tutors undertaken at Harrogate College of Arts and Adult Studies. The project aimed to identify the staff development needs of tutors involved in the OWTLET open learning scheme and to pilot supportive strategies.

STRUCTURE OF THE OWTLET SCHEME

2. The North Yorkshire Open Learning Scheme, OWTLET, (derived from Other Ways To Learn -Educational Technology), established in 1979, differed from most open learning schemes in its flexibility, its essential features being:

   * it must accommodate the individual learner
   * in any subject
   * at any level
   * for examination or non-examination courses or vocational or non-vocational studies
   * with no constraints on length or timing of the course

3. The two essential criteria of the OWTLET scheme were that learning materials could be derived from any source and that an appropriate tutor could be appointed. Tutor/student contact is open to negotiation and can be via face-to-face contact, individually or in groups, by telephone, letter or audio-cassette.

4. Financially, the scheme is self-supporting: learning materials are hired to the student and tutorial time is paid retrospectively by the student on a pro rata basis, according to the level of work and number of students in the tutor group. At the outset of the scheme the tutors were unpaid but the large response to initial advertising necessitated some form of direct payment.

5. The introduction of payments to OWTLET tutors brought to light the frequency and duration of tutor/student contact: in some cases long gaps between tutorials were apparent. It was at this stage, when concern was expressed at the level of student participation, that the PICKUP grant was applied for to evaluate the existing provision of the OWTLET scheme and determine staff development needs.

THE PROJECT - STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR OPEN LEARNING TUTORS

6. The evaluation project was conceived as an attempt to overcome administrative and organisational problems, tutors' apprehension, and to determine the effectiveness of the scheme. Because of the flexible nature of the OWTLET scheme and the wide variation in tutorial techniques, a closely - defined staff development programme was considered inappropriate. It was therefore decided to concentrate on the characteristics of open learning and its distinctions from traditional teacher-centred learning, particularly concerning communication, assessment and materials.

PHASE ONE

7. To asertain a broad view of in-service tutor training requirements, the first phase of the project was devoted to:

- a literature review
- student and tutor questionnaires
- visits to established open learning centres
- attendance at open learning workshops

Literature review

8. The literature review was undertaken to avoid duplication of research. With the exception of certain publications produced by the Open University (OU), National Extension College (NEC) and the Council for Educational Technology (CET), there appeared to be little guidance in early literature, which mainly concentrated on the philosophy of

open learning rather than on staff development needs (see Appendix B, Further Reading). The review raised further questions concerning meeting the particular needs of tutors, the answers to which were sought by interviews and questionnaires.

Questionnaires and interviews

9. Questionnaires sent to students enrolled on the OWTLET scheme proved to be unsatisfactory for their purpose, providing inadequate information. Questionnaires circulated to open learning tutors also evoked a poor response. Conversely, the interviews with tutors produced valuable feedback, identifying problems and giving some insight into the needs of OWTLET students.

Visits and workshops

10. A number of visits to open learning centres were undertaken, including an open learning tutor training workshop. The visits revealed that: organisers of other open learning schemes shared an awareness of the need for staff development but no programmes had been devised; the modes of operation of other schemes were so dissimilar to OWTLET that they raised different problems; there were no widespread practical solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING PHASE ONE

11. The following recommendations were gradually implemented upon completion of the first phase:

- students to be contacted at quarterly interviews
- learning materials to be kept under constant review
- some payment of fees in advance (to reinforce students' interest in the scheme and to obviate delays in making payments to tutors)
- initial tutor/student contact to be face to face
- tutors to receive instruction on the history and philosophy of open learning and some training in study counselling

PHASE TWO

12. Phase two comprised three strategies:

- the modification of administrative procedures
- a series of tutor meetings
- the preparation of three staff development units

Modification of administrative procedures

i) additional information was given in response to initial enquiries from prospective students;

ii) students' progress and contact time with tutors was monitored more closely;

iii) tutors' remuneration rates were modified;

iv) publicity on further information and advice was increased.

Tutor Meetings

13. A series of five staff development meetings for tutors took place in 1983, each focusing on a particular topic. An outline of the discussions is given below:

Learning materials

The importance of the functions, availability and adaptation of learning materials was stressed.

Initial interview

The introduction of a registration fee meant that the cost of the first two hours of contact time could be covered, and interview time was claimable, irrespective of whether the prospective student was accepted or rejected by a tutor.

More detailed student profiles were required by tutors. It was agreed that clearly-defined short-term objectives should be settled, together with a deadline for the submission of the first piece of work.

Maintaining contact

The functions and range of channels of communication were clarified. There was a belief that face-to-face contact was of paramount importance but it was hoped that, when student numbers permitted, group tutorials could be arranged. There were mixed views on the effectivness of using teleconferencing and communication by audio-cassette as media for tutorials.

Information, advice, counselling

Tutors required more than the bare minimum amount of personal details but without any unnecessary intrusion into the individual's privacy. Further background information could be more tactfully obtained at the interview rather than by questionnaire.

Review and open forum

The plenary session focused on the unusual nature of the OWTLET scheme and the particular roles of student, tutor and learning materials. The usefulness of regular tutor meetings was noted, especially for updating purposes, self-help and improving overall efficiency. The time factor, however, precluded such meetings from covering all the ground; it was, therefore, decided to produce staff development units, thus enabling tutors to have some form of guidance permanently available and to experience open learning first-hand.

Preparation of Staff Development Units

14. Three units were prepared:

The concept of open learning;
The initial meeting;
A continuing dialogue.

These units appear as Appendix A to this report.

15. Initially, draft copies were sent to tutors in charge of City and Guilds 730 courses, as their students were considered to be the most obvious target group.

16. The units were offered in open learning form to avoid encroaching on classroom time and to provide tutors with first hand experience of this mode of learning. The content was generalised to make the material suitable for tutors in a wide range of subjects. Ten areas of guidance were covered:

i) Conceptual clarification of open learning, including its historical development and general aims (Unit One);

ii) A need for a clearer understanding of the role of the tutor in responding to the requirements of the open learning student (enrolled on the OWTLET scheme) (Unit One);

iii) A need to study and evaluate learning materials (Unit Two);

iv) An appreciation of the availability and choice of learning materials (Unit Two);

v) Guidance on the provision of learning materials where no commercial package exists (Unit Two);

vi) Insight into the possibilities for modifying and/or supplementing learning materials for individual student requirements (Unit Two);

vii) The importance of the first meeting for establishing an effective working relationship with the student (Unit Two);

viii) The importance of sustaining contact with students (Unit Three);

ix) The need to develop skills appropriate to communicating effectively at a distance (Unit Three);

x) The importance of optimising use of face-to-face contact (Unit Three).

These ten areas were intended to meet the needs of OWTLET tutors who were experiencing problems in :

- selecting learning materials;
- initiating tutor support;
- maintaining contact.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

17. Open learning has proved to be an effective means to higher levels of study. The following points did however emerge:

- open learning is also used as a foundation for formal class-based study;

- there was a distinct shift away from non-vocational study to vocational/examination studies (80% of the provision);

- demand for group provision has increased;

- there has been a general broadening of clientele;

- less sophisticated learning materials are often preferred;

- more full-time teachers became involved but there was still a demand for specialists for professional studies;

- there is a perceived preference for student-centred learning and therefore a changing role for the tutor.

18. Tutor meetings will continue, together with less frequent tutor/student meetings. Study units will be made available to all tutors for further discussion. There will be an ongoing evaluation both of the units and of the learning material (the documentation of which will be computerised) and teachers will be encouraged to exploit alternative learning strategies. The levels of students' achievement together with the dedication of the tutors should enhance the value of the staff development programme.

APPENDIX A

OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

UNIT ONE

THE CONCEPT OF OPEN LEARNING

Val Horner

Harrogate College of Arts

CONTENTS

			Page
1.	Aim and Objectives		11
2.	Study Guide		12
3.	Open Learning Systems	(2.3; 7.1)	15
4.	Open Learning Student	(1.1; 1.2)	19
5.	The Role of the Open Learning Tutor	(7.5)	27
6.	Conclusion		31

Numbers in brackets refer to relevant sections of the City and Guilds 730 Syllabus.

1. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to introduce student teachers to the concept of open learning in Further and Adult Education.

When you have completed it you should be able to:

A. State the defining characteristics of an open learning scheme.

B. Outline a brief history of open learning systems.

C. Distinguish between open learning tutoring and classroom teaching.

D. Identify possible problems facing the student enrolled in open learning.

E. Describe the role and responsibilities of the tutor in relation to the open learning student.

2. STUDY GUIDE

This material is intended to be studied at home and at your own pace; if difficulties arise, which cannot be resolved, make a note of them and consult your tutor during class attendance at College. There are three general points to keep in mind:

(a) The material is intended as an integral part of the City and Guilds 730 Syllabus. The learning potential of the text therefore will operate most effectively if you do not treat it in isolation from the rest of your studies but instead make a conscious effort to relate the content both to work you have already covered and to any parts of the syllabus you have yet to encounter.

(b) In using the material you yourself will be operating as an open learning student so be alert to what this experience has to teach you with regard to the advantages and disadvantages latent in this mode of learning.

(c) In common with most open learning material these Units are unlike conventional text books in that as you read through them you will be required from time to time to make an active response. A note book or sheet of paper should be kept at hand for this purpose and ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE PAUSED TO CONSIDER THE QUESTION ASKED AND HAVE NOTED YOUR RESPONSE, should you go on to read any discussion of the point raised. It is easier to resist the temptation to read on if you keep the subsequent discussion covered whilst attempting your own response!

QUESTION 1

Why do you think it is important not to read through the text without making the required responses?

DISCUSSION

Your own experience as a teacher and your study of the principles of learning and of teaching may have convinced you that effective progress is more likely to occur when the student is ACTIVELY participating in the learning process.

3.0 OPEN LEARNING SYSTEMS (Objectives A, B and C)

If in the past you have come across the phrase 'open learning' you may well have been puzzled by the vagueness of the term. This lack of precision arises from the widespread practice of applying the concept to a diversity of educational systems which often seem to have very little in common. In this section I will try to dispel any possible confusion by setting out the defining characteristics of a so-called open learning system.

You will be familiar from your studies with the very wide range of educational opportunity offered by the various institutions of further and adult education. But for the purpose of this exercise I want you to focus on the negative side of that provision and to consider a number of constraints or limitations that it places on the potential student. The most significant of these are as follows:-

(a) Educational institutions may require a minimum student enrolment below which the class must not fall before any specific course is offered and maintained. As a result minority subjects may be poorly represented in the curriculum and the student who wishes to study such a subject may be denied access to his chosen field of study.

(b) The student may have to fulfil certain educational pre-requisites before entry to a particular course is permitted. Thus a mature adult anxious to return to study may find that he*can only do so by tackling a range of 'O' and 'A' level courses many of which may be ill-suited to his needs and experience.

(c) The student who in spite of the above, successfully enrols for a chosen course of study, must of necessity be prepared and able to attend a stipulated place at pre-determined times throughout a fixed academic year. Thus working hours, parental responsibility, physical disability, geographical inaccessibility, may all prove stumbling blocks to the aspiring student.

3.1 THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF AN OPEN LEARNING SYSTEM

An open learning system seeks to make educational provision more accessible by the elimination of one or more of the above constraints. The aim of all open learning schemes then is to increase the student's freedom by offering a greater flexibility of approach to study. In the process all open learning systems make SOME use of learning materials (e.g. the text you are now studying) designed to be studied by the student as an individual rather than as a member of a class.

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* N.B. In the interest of brevity I am adopting the dubious convention of referring to the student as 'he' rather than 'he/she' throughout.

3.2 OPEN LEARNING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Long before the phrase open learning was coined correspondence colleges (e.g. The National Extension College) attempted to cater for the student who from choice or necessity wished to study at home rather than in the classroom. As the name suggests the correspondence student studies at a distance both from fellow students and the tutor assigned to mark and assess his progress.

It has been found however that only a minority of students can cope effectively with the complete isolation that correspondence courses entail. Consequently a variety of schemes have emerged that seek to avoid the constraints listed above without imposing an intolerable level of isolation upon the student. This is done by combining the use of individualised learning material, with a number of additional supports usually provided by the student's local educational institution. These supports may include:

(a) A local tutor available for occasional face-to-face contact, on an individual or small group basis.

(b) Access to college-based resources (e.g. library, workshop, counselling service etc.).

(c) The opportunity to attend intensive Day and/or Summer Schools.

In addition an effort may be made to supplement traditional correspondence type learning material with more modern educational technology (e.g. radio, television, cassette etc.).

The best known and most comprehensive of these newer open learning systems is the Open University but following in its wake came a large and steadily growing number of lower-level schemes. Some of these (e.g. T.E.C. and B.E.C. Courses) are generated nationally and operated locally whilst others are unique to particular Further and Adult Education institutions. (N.Y. O.L. scheme - O.W.T.L.E.T.)

The rapid development of information technology e.g. video, cable television, computers etc., with a vast potential for home-based study suggests that interest in open learning will grow rather than diminish. There is thus every possibility that student teachers will at some stage in their careers be required to act in the capacity of open learning tutors.

3.3 THE OPEN LEARNING TUTOR

The essential difference between open learning tutoring and traditional class teaching arises from three factors:

(a) The open learning tutor is no longer the PRIMARY information source for his students, since this function is taken over by individualised learning material which need not be studied in the classroom.

(b) The open learning tutor sees his students less regularly and for shorter periods than the class teacher.

(c) The face-to-face contact that does take place between open learning tutor and student is usually on an individual or small group basis, rather than in the form of a conventionally sized class.

QUESTION 2

Without referring back to the text write in your note book:

A. The defining characteristics of an open learning system.

B. A brief outline of the historical development of such systems.

C. The essential differences between open learning tutoring and class teaching.

Then check your answers by re-reading Sections: 3.1: 3.2: 3.3 above.

4.0 THE OPEN LEARNING STUDENT (Objective D)

As we have seen, the student enrolled in an open learning scheme enjoys greater freedom than his counterpart working within the context of traditional Further and Adult Education. For example the latter will be committed to attendance at a college for at least one or two hours a week and this attendance will set the pattern and largely dictate the pace of his progress through a course of study, whilst the progress of the open learning student will typically centre around individualised learning materials which he can study in his own home, in his own time.

QUESTION 3

Pause for a moment and ask yourself whether the flexibility and freedom aimed at by open learning systems, could itself be the source of problems for the student and then try to jot down in your note book an indication of what these difficulties might be.

DISCUSSION

This is one of those irritating questions that have no obviously right or wrong answer and if you simple wrote 'it all depends on the student and the subject studied' your impatience would be understandable. There are however a number of potential problems that cut across subject areas in that they arise out of the learning process itself. You may, for example, have noted that the open learning student will have to exercise a considerable degree of self-discipline if he is to make effective use of the freedom he possesses.

Different theories of learning give conflicting accounts of the nature of the learning process but they tend to agree that there are pre-requisites for its occurrence and we will now look at the most important of these conditions from the point of view of the open learning student.

4.1 MOTIVATION AND ACTIVITY

It is a generally accepted principle (verifiable from your own experience!) that learning is not a passive, easy process but one that demands effort and long term perseverance. The acquisition of knowledge and skill is after all a dynamic and cumulative process requiring the frequent and regular activity that effective teaching strategies aim to promote. Individualised learning materials allow the student to proceed at his own pace, eliminating the frustration that occurs in class when able students are held back or conversely less able students fail to keep pace. But clearly this advantage is only operative when the student can find the self-discipline and drive needed to ensure that the material is worked at regularly and systematically.

A student may start on a course of study with determination and energy born of a desire to master a new area of experience but this initial drive has to be maintained if success is to be achieved. The traditional educational institution offers a framework for study which can itself help to sustain motivation by providing for example:-

(a) The intangible (but nevertheless real!) sense of 'belonging' that arises from the sharing of common interests and goals.

(b) Regular interaction with fellow students giving rise to relationships which can be both competitive and supportive.

(c) Regular interaction with teachers qualified to anticipate problems, to set clearly defined manageable goals and to generally stimulate flagging interest and enthusiasm.

In the absence of regular contacts of this kind the open learning student may begin to feel cut-off and alone and may find in consequence that just keeping going with his chosen course requires an unexpected and demoralising degree of effort.

4.2 FEEDBACK

All theories of learning tend to stress the importance of 'feedback'. In other words there is general agreement that information on the correctness or otherwise of performance, must be constantly 'fed-back' to the student in order to enable him to evaluate his own progress and to take corrective action where necessary.

4.3 REINFORCEMENT

In Behaviourist Theory the need for feedback is equated with the important part prompt reinforcement plays in the learning process. Reinforcement can be defined as any rewarding stimulus (e.g. praise; attention; success etc.) that increases the likelihood that the preceding response made by the student will be repeated (i.e. will be learnt).

The Behaviourist views learning in terms of trial and error. In a novel situation the subject (i.e. the student) makes a number of random responses; those that are successful (i.e. those that are reinforced) will be retained (i.e. learnt); those that are not successful will be discarded. The essence of teaching according to this theory, lies in the shaping of the required response, by appropriate, selective, reinforcement. The most important application of the theory is known as Programmed Learning, either in book or machine form. There are several variations but most rest on the following three principles:

(a) What is to be learnt must be clearly defined in terms of what the student should be able to do.

(b) Material should be designed (i.e. programmed) to minimise the probability of error and presented in a logical sequence of small steps.

(c) Each step should demand a response from the student and be followed immediately by confirmation of the correctness of the answer given.

Most open learning packages take these principles to heart and endeavour to incorporate them, with varying degrees of success, into their presentation. There are however limitations on the extent to which programmed learning in its entirety can be utilized, since item (c) above, rests on the assumption that there is a simply stated correct answer to every question the teacher wishes to put to the student. Thus programmed learning, by book or machine, can be extremely efficient for example in teaching remedial mathematics, but it is difficult to see how it could be made use of in teaching, for example, fine art or literature.

Developments in information technology will almost certainly mean the increasingly sophisticated use of programmed learning but on the present state of play, students enrolled in open learning schemes are still largely dependent for feedback on the continuing assessment of their work by qualified tutors. Since open learning students typically work alone, this reinforcement may sometimes be fragmentary and delayed. This is particularly likely to apply to those students who only see their tutors on rare occasions and who must thus rely on an exchange of work through the post in order to obtain feedback on their performance.

4.4 UNDERSTANDING

In Cognitive theories of learning, the need for feedback is related not to reinforcement as above, but to the decisive importance in the learning process of 'understanding', sometimes referred to as 'Insight'. 'Cognition' is another word for knowledge and is distinguished from both emotion and behaviour. Thus the Behaviourist will typically ask 'What does the student do?' whilst the Cognitive Theorist is more likely to ask 'What does the student understand?'

Understanding is experienced, when we see how the parts of a problem relate to each other; when we see how new information can be integrated into what we already know; when we see how this in turn can be generalised to other areas of experience.

The Cognitive Theorist then takes a holistic view of learning, that is to say he is interested in how parts of a pattern are related to make up a total whole. The Behavourist on the other hand takes a reductionist view, that is to say he is concerned with reducing material to its individual parts.

The teacher is in the happy position of not needing to enter into the disciplinary battles that exist between various theories of learning, but instead can extract from such theories those concepts that are most useful to him. And just as 'reinforcement' is too useful a concept to ignore, so also, 'understanding' as defined above, can be readily appreciated as being of the utmost importance.

In class the efficient teacher will be alert for signs that a student does not understand the material being presented and will have sufficient flexibility to modify his presentation accordingly. For the open learning student it is different, the material is there before him in concrete, apparently immutable form, if he reaches a point where his understanding fails, he is in a difficult position. If he struggles on, difficulties will multiply, if he stops, valuable studying time will be ticking away.

There is a related problem in the extent to which the student accepts the material he is studying. Any teacher of adults knows that students are usually very willing to question the information they are given in class and the flexible teacher recognises the fruitfulness of such open enquiry. The student who works alone may either tend to accept unquestioningly the validity of the learning text, or suffer frustration at his inability to immediately disagree and argue back. If you have found yourself in disagreement with some of the preceding text, or have been unable to understand some of the argument, you will yourself have experienced the difficulties inherent in a one-way mode of communication.

4.5 PROBLEMS FACING THE OPEN LEARNING STUDENT

The difficulties we have considered above should not be thought of as unique to open learning. Rather they are problems that relate to students and teachers everywhere; the point to remember is that such problems may be aggravated by the nature of open learning. The problems facing the student enrolled in open learning however are not insurmountable; in future units we will be considering how such potential difficulties can be anticipated and either overcome or at least kept to manageable proportions.

QUESTION 3

List some possible problems, arising out of the nature of the learning process, that may face the student enrolled in open learning.

DISCUSSION

You should have made some mention of those problems arising from:

(a) The importance of sustaining the student's motivation and level of activity.

(b) The student's need for prompt and regular feedback.

(c) The student's need for prompt and regular reinforcement of correct responses.

(d) The importance of ensuring understanding on the part of the student.

(e) The importance of opportunity for the student to question and disagree.

If you have thought of more so much the better, try to find an opportunity to discuss them with your tutor and fellow students.

5.0 THE ROLE OF THE OPEN LEARNING TUTOR (Objective E)

The adoption of any social role pre-supposes the existence of a reciprocal relationship. For example, the role of doctor is related to the role of patient, the role of parent is related to the role of off-spring and the role of teacher is related to the role of pupil etc.

The concepts 'doctor', 'parent', 'teacher' cannot be defined without reference to the related concepts 'patient', 'off-spring' and 'pupil'.

When an individual takes on a social role he assumes responsibilities that govern a relationship of this kind; responsibilities which in turn are shaped by the standardised expectations of society with regard to that relationship.

Clearly the role of teacher/tutor involves a variety of responsibilities but these can be conveniently subsumed under one general characteristic:

> The role of teacher/tutor carries an overall responsibility for the creation of conditions in which learning on the part of pupils/students is most likely to occur.

How a tutor views his role will depend mainly on:

(a) His own expectation of how the role should be played.

(b) The expectations of his employers.

(c) The expectations of his students.

Perhaps the most tangible and easily grasped of these expectations, shared mutually by all concerned, is that tutor and students should meet regularly in order that the tutor can instruct by communicating skills and information to the students.

But, as we have seen, in open learning schemes the importance of instruction as a tutorial responsibility is radically reduced, since the task of acting as the primary source of information for the student is largely removed from the tutor and taken over by the provision of specially designed learning materials.

The commonly held assumption then that the tutor's role centres round the act of instruction is undermined in open learning and the result can be that both tutor and students feel confused and a little unsure of what exactly is expected of them.

This lack of confidence is aggravated for the new tutor by the fact that most open learning schemes are in their infancy. There may accordingly be a lack of clear directives on the part of employers and the colleagues to whom he turns for guidance are likely to be as inexperienced as he is himself.

As far as the student is concerned this lack of assurance may be compounded by isolation from fellow students, since the easy path of simply taking one's cue from the rest of the class is no longer available.

At this point perhaps we should back-track and look again at that defining characteristic:-

> The role of tutor carries an overall responsibility for creating conditions in which learning on the part of students is most likely to occur.

Now clearly a context in which both tutor and student are unsure of what is expected of them, is not the one most likely to promote learning. Thus the tutor needs to take steps from the outset to clarify the situation and there are at least three ways in which he can set about doing this.

FIRSTLY he can remind himself that responsibility, for creating conditions conducive to learning, involves certain duties which are common to both open learning schemes and traditional education. For example, the responsibility for specifying learning objectives and for assessing the extent to which these are achieved by the students. Also responsibility for managing and generally supervising the students' progress. This item indeed is likely to take on a new urgency and importance in the light of the problems that may face the open learning student. (See 4 above) Moreover although the open learning tutor is no longer the primary source of information, he is nevertheless responsible for supporting the learning material that is supplied to the student, in ways that we will be considering in future Units.

SECONDLY he can seek clear instructions from his employers on all matters of organisational procedure. These will differ from scheme to scheme but the tutor should ascertain from the outset, his exact position for example with relation to the selection of learning materials: when and how often he should contact students; what records of contact should be kept, etc.

THIRDLY the tutor can make sure in conjunction with the college organisational staff, that the student also, is clear from the outset, what is expected of him and what he in turn can expect of the college and in particular what he can expect of the tutor in their receiprocal roles of student and tutor.

To sum up, the role of the tutor in open learning, can be equated with the role of the teacher in traditional education since both involve responsibility for creating conditions in which learning is most likely to occur.

Nevertheless the role of the tutor and the related role of the student are marked in open learning by a departure from traditional social expectations and in order to avoid possible confusion, the open learning tutor should endeavour from the outset, to clarify the position both for himself and for his students.

QUESTION 4

(i) What overall responsibility does the role of open learning tutor carry?

(ii) List some specific duties that the responsibility entails.

(iii) Give two ways in which the tutor can avoid confusion arising from the novelty of the open learning modes of tuition.

DISCUSSION

Your answers should make clear that the role of open learning tutor carries a responsibility for creating conditions in which learning is likely to occur and that this will include for example:

(a) The specifying of learning objectives.

(b) Supporting the learning material.

(c) Supervising and managing the students' progress (bearing in mind the conditions for learning discussed in Section 4).

(d) Monitoring and assessing the extent to which learning objectives are progressively met.

Your final answer should indicate that the tutor can best avoid confusion if from the start he:

(a) Clarifies for himself the extent and nature of his organisational duties.

(b) Makes clear to the student the nature of the relationship that will exist between them in their roles of tutor and student.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This Unit has taken a very general look at the concept of open learning from the point of view of both the student and the tutor. In future sections of the course we will explore in greater detail many of the issues I have raised and in particular in Unit 3 we will consider ways in which an effective dialogue can be maintained between open learning tutor and student.

But perhaps the first requirement for success in open learning (reflected in Section 5 above) is to establish from the outset a working relationship between student and tutor based on mutual expectations and understanding. Consequently Unit 2 will concentrate on some of the necessary tasks that can best be undertaken by tutors when they first assume responsibility for students who are about to embark on a course of open learning.

OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

UNIT TWO

THE INITIAL MEETING

Val Horner

Harrogate College of Arts

Evaluation of Learning Materials

Open Learning in Further Education

When you have completed work on the Unit please answer the following question. They are in no way intended as an assessment of your performance but your answers will be invaluable in helping us to evaluate the effectiveness of the material. It would be a good idea to make a note of the time whenever you start studying the material and again when you stop.

1. What was the total time spent working on the Unit?

2. How long (roughly) did you take over the Questions incorporated in the Unit?

3. How difficult did you find the material as a whole? Very difficult; Fairly difficult; About right; Fairly easy; Very easy (Please tick as appropriate)

4. Which section(s) (if any) did you find most difficult? least difficult?

   Please try to indicate why.

5. How interesting did you find the material as a whole? Very interesting; Fairly interesting; Not at all interesting. (Please tick as appropriate)

6. Which section(s) (if any) did you find most interesting? least interesting?

   Please try to indicate why.

7. How useful did you find the material as a whole? Very useful; Fairly useful; Not at all useful.

8. Which section(s) (if any) did you find most useful? least useful?

   Please try to indicate why.

We would be extremely glad of any other comments you may care to make on any aspect of the material.

CONTENTS

		Page
1.	Aim and Objectives	37
2.	Study Guide	38
3.	Open Learning Materials (3.1.)	39
4.	Supplementing the Learning Materials (3.2.)	43
5.	The Initial Meeting (2.1: 4.4.)	49
6.	Conclusion	60

Numbers in brackets refer to relevant sections of the City & Guilds 730 Syllabus.

1.0. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to introduce student teachers to the techniques and skills required in the initial stages of open learning tutoring.

When you have completed it you should be able to:

A. List the resources which may be utilized in open learning.

B. Recognize the tutor's responsibilities in relation to specially designed open learning materials.

C. Specify the differences that exist between students in relation to their learning characteristics.

D. Outline the purpose and importance of the initial contact between open learning tutor and student.

2.0. STUDY GUIDE

Before commencing work on this Unit you should carry out a quick review of Unit 1. The most effective way is to make sure you can answer questions 2, 3 and 4 without reference to the text. Do not attempt to answer in full but satisfy yourself that you have retained the salient points by jotting down a few key words. Then read quickly through the discussion following each question. You should not spend longer than about 10 minutes on this exercise.

Unit 1 concluded with a discussion of the role of the tutor in open learning, this Unit is a direct continution and will focus on the early stages of a tutor - student relationship.

You will by now be familiar with the method I am adopting and will have a good idea of how much studying time is required.

Do not forget to attempt an answer to all questions before reading the subsequent discussion.

3.0. OPEN LEARNING MATERIALS (Objective A)

There is a surprisingly wide range of self-study material available and the variety is increasing steadily. All tutors, even those not involved in open learning, could usefully acquaint themselves with the market, since much of the material has potential as an effective teaching aid. The Open University knew that it had arrived, when early in its existence evidence appeared that university lecturers were regularly advising their students to study Open University learning materials and in addition were purchasing the Units for their own use in the preparation of tutorials and lectures! But of course open learning is not confined to studying for a degree, most subjects and leisure interests are catered for and often at all levels of study.

Examples of some of the major sources of supply are as follows:-

National Extension College

Wolsey Hall Oxford Limited

Dundee College of Education

The Rapid Results College

Linguaphone

BBC Publications

NALGO Correspondence Institute

Packages marketed by suppliers such as these incorporate a number of familiar learning aids and it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the full range of learning resources available to open learning students.

QUESTION 1

From your knowledge of learning resources in general, make a list of all those that you think might be included in the provision of open learning materials.

DISCUSSION

3.1. LEARNING RESOURCES SUITABLE FOR HOME-BASED STUDY

(a) Written and Graphic Material

The core of an open learning package is likely to be an explanatory text, illustrated where necessary. It may stand alone or more often be used in conjunction with text books, 'readers', and perhaps work-sheets. Usually called a Unit or Module this written material acts as the student's primary information source and in this respect takes the traditional place of the class teacher.

(b) Audio Cassette

Audio cassettes play a major part in the open learning of languages and a supporting role in many other subjects (e.g. literature).

(c) Television and Radio

Many courses centre round a series of programmes on television and/or radio. Language courses are again obvious candidates but the scope is wide and has ranged in the past from Dressmaking to International Affairs.

(d) Experimental Kits

The Open University supplies these to science students, to enable them to perform home experiments but provision requires the backing of an elaborate organisation and at lower levels necessary laboratory and work-shop experience is more likely to take place within local institutions. This sometimes presents problems and we will return to the matter in a later Unit.

3.2. COLLEGE-BASED RESOURCES

All of the resources so far listed are suitable for use by the student working at home. More sophisticated items of educational technology, for example:

slide/strips
films
video cassettes
computers

are more likely to be utilized by those open learning systems which bring the student into the college on a fairly regular basis.

These are schemes which are 'open' in the sense that they avoid constraints on study imposed by the demand for a minimum student enrolment before any specific course is offered and the requirement that students attend college at specified times.

The first of these restrictions may be by-passed by providing students with individualised learning materials. Thus a number of students, working within a common field, may well be studying simultaneously for different qualifications at different levels and yet be supervised and monitored by the same tutor. A frequently cited example is the Flexastudy programme for business studies at Redditch College.

The second constraint is avoided by permitting the student to attend college on a much more flexible basis than the traditional course demands. There are a variety of schemes sometimes called 'Learning by Appointment' or 'Learning on Demand'. Examples are the County Programmed Learning Centre at St Albans, where the public are invited to attend the college in their own time in order to make use of a range of self-instructional learning materials and the Mathematics Workshop at Bradford College, where students have open access to a wide range of mathematical materials and a general tutor who can be called on for help by individual students.

More generally, college-based resources may well be utilized from time to time by students who work primarily at home but with the opportunity for some face-to-face tuition at the parent college. This is the practice of the North Yorkshire Open Learning Scheme Other Ways to Learn Educational Technology (OWTLET) which aims at maximum flexibility both in the nature of subjects offered and in the type of tutorial support provided.

Look back now at the learning resources you have listed in your notebook and check that you have appreciated the full range available.

4.0. SUPPLEMENTING THE LEARNING MATERIAL (Objective 8)

Given that a tutor has been allocated to an open learning student(s) his first task is to familiarise himself with the learning material that he is required to support.

Professionally produced open learning packages are usually of a high standard but there are exceptions to the rule. If a tutor is dissatisfied with the quality of any particular course (e.g. It is out of date or contains factual errors) he has a duty to report the matter to his employers and to seek alternative material for his students. The Council for Educational Technology is currently attempting to compile a list of approved materials and the opinions of tutors will be welcomed and respected.

In open learning, as we saw in Unit 1, learning material replaces the tutor as the primary information source, consequently the best material fulfils a number of functions traditionally carried out in the classroom. The material:

(i) .Acts as a guide enabling the student to make full and effective use of the total learning package, including text-books, broadcasts, cassettes etc.

(ii) Specifies clear learning objectives (i.e. what the student can hope to be able to do as a result of working through the material).

(iii) Gives the student the means to meet these objectives (e.g. by providing a clear, full, explanatory text).

(iv) Presents material in a way calculated to stimulate and hold the student's interest.

(v) Makes adequate provision for reinforced activity on the part of the student (e.g. Regular self-assessment exercises with model answers).

(vi) Provides for the continuous monitoring and assessing of progress by including assignments, work-sheets etc. to be sent to a supporting tutor for marking and comments.

As the tutor familiarises himself with the material his students are to study he should be alert to the possibility that some of these functions may be inadequately fulfilled. He will then be in a position to anticipate problems and to plan the use of contact time* in a way calculated to minimise deficiencies. Possibilities for supplementing and supporting the material in this way are so various and so open to the individual tutor's ingenuity and initiative that I will make only a few suggestions here. For example, the tutor may choose to:

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* N.B. Contact time, as we will see in later Units, can be widely interpreted to include marking of assignments, communication by telephone and audio cassette, as well as occasional face-to-face meetings both individual and group.

(a) Draw attention to sections of the course that need particular care, or conversely, ones that can be passed over relatively quickly.

(b) Inform the student of television programmes, exhibitions, local objects and events that are relevant to and may help to enliven, a course of study.

(c) Provide book lists, magazine and newspaper articles etc.

(d) Prepare hand-outs, perhaps drawing on his own lecture notes, to fill out areas of the course that he feels need fuller coverage.

(e) Offer additional or alternative exercises.

(f) Supply a 'model-answer' for a typical course assignment.

QUESTION 2

A tutor working with the North Yorkshire Open Learning Scheme OUTLET diagnosed the following two faults in an, in some ways, excellent learning package. It was felt that:

A. Too much prior knowledge on the part of the student was assumed. As a result there was a tendency to pack a great deal of essential material into the early stages of the course without adequate allowance for the student's lack of familiarity with basic concepts and technical terms. (See Function (iii) above)

B. Exercises were too widely spaced so that the student had to absorb a great deal of theoretical material before actively practising what had been presented. (See Functions (v) and (vi) above)

In your notebook try to suggest ways in which a tutor might seek to alleviate deficiencies of this kind.

DISCUSSION

You may have noticed that this example touches on two of the problems discussed in Unit 1, Section 4. A. The danger that a student may fail to understand material and B. The student's need to be actively engaged in his studies and to receive regular reinforcement of that activity.

Possible solutions here might be:

A. The provision of a glossary of terms for easy reference. Advice to the new student to move slowly in the early stages of the course, taking time to ensure that basic concepts are grasped and assimilated and making notes of difficulties as they arise for referral to the tutor during contact time.

B. The provision of additional exercises to be tackled by the student at strategic points in the course, either for self-assessment with answers provided, or to be sent to and marked by the tutor.

5i

QUESTION 3

It has been suggested above that six functions are performed by good learning material and that when these are inadequately fulfilled, the tutor will need to find ways of supplementing and supporting the material offered.

Without referring back to the text, try to list in your note book these six important functions and then check your answers by re-reading Section 4.0.

Before leaving the question of learning materials, it should be mentioned that tutors are sometimes asked to take responsibility for open learning students, who wish to study subjects for which no suitable commercially produced material is available.

The matter cannot be dealt with adequately here, since the strategy to be adopted in a situation of this kind will be determined by too many unknown variables. For example:

A. The nature of the subject matter (e.g. practical; theoretical; leisure; vocational etc.).

B. The level of study required (e.g. remedial; beginner; advanced etc.).

C. The maturity of the student and amount of previous study experience.

D. The extent to which the student will be expected to work alone, without tutorial supervision.

It should be stressed however that this is never a task to be undertaken lightly, since it is generally recognised that the preparation of material which will adequately fulfil the functions considered in this section is a specialised and time-consuming process.

In general indeed it may be taken as axiomatic that the tutor concerned will need advance help and guidance on how to proceed, except perhaps in those cases where the home-learning element is to be small and the student and tutor can expect close and regular contact.

Useful publications include:

LEWIS, Roger, How to Write Self-Study Materials (1981)
CET Publications

PERRATON, H, The Techniques of Writing Correspondence Courses (1976)
NEC Reports

5.0. THE INITIAL MEETING (Objectives C and D)

The value of a good working knowledge of available learning material is manifest from the very beginning of an open learning relationship; a relationship that commences with an introductory meeting between prospective tutor and student conducted wherever and whenever possible on a face-to-face basis. Tutors sometimes look upon this initial meeting as a mere preliminary, believing that little can be achieved before the student has actually got down to work on the learning material. Such an approach is shortsighted, indeed it could be said that the viability of a proposed course of study frequently rests on the quality of the first meeting between tutor and student and we will look now at some of the reasons for its importance.

Before the meeting takes place the tutor should:

(a) Find out any particulars relating to the student obtained by the office staff at registration.

(b) Acquaint himself with details of the course of study proposed. (e.g. Syllabus where appropriate.)

(c) Investigate the current availability of learning materials and if possible have examples of these to hand.

The meeting itself has three basic aims:

(a) To assess the student's needs and abilities.

(b) To recommend the learning material most likely to be in accord with these.

(c) To work out and agree a learning-plan for at least the early stages of the course of study.

5.1. A DIVERSITY OF LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS

As every teacher is aware students vary widely in their learning characteristics. This is particularly true of adults who in the course of their lives can be expected to have encountered a considerable variety of learning experience.

QUESTION 4

In what respects do individuals differ in relation to their approach to learning and their ability to cope with a course of study?

DISCUSSION

Individuals differ in their:

(a) Desires, goals and aims.

(b) Level of motivation. (For the importance of motivation see Unit 1, Section 1).

(c) Level of maturity and capacity for self-discipline.

(d) Ability to sustain concentration and follow through a logical sequence.

(e) Predilection for problem solving.

(f) Power of long and short-term memory.

(g) Knowledge and experience.

(h) Practical ability and skills (including study-skills!).

(i) Resources of energy and time available for study.

(j) Access to facilities for study. (e.g. a quiet room; a workshop; a video recorder etc.)

This is quite a formidable list but it is by no means comprehensive and you may well have thought of other significant differences. The important point is the range of learning characteristics. At one extreme students exist who know exactly what they want to learn and who possess the ability, experience and resources to pursue their aims with the minimum of assistance. At the other extreme there are prospective students with little relevant experience and minimal resources who possess only a hazy and essentially unrealistic notion of what a course of study entails. In the face of this kind of diversity the tutor has the difficult and often delicate task of recommending the learning material and course of study that is not suitable for both the student's aims and capabilities.

5.2. CLARIFYING THE STUDENT'S AIMS

The level of motivation we bring to any task (i.e. the energy and drive that enables us to get started on and to sustain a course of action) is very closely related to the strength of our wants and aims. With this in mind it is worth while encouraging the prospective student to articulate as fully as he can his reasons for wishing to study. For example:

(a) Does he have a particular qualification in mind?

(b) Is the choice of study linked in some way to his occupation?

(c) Is he planning a change of direction and feeling the need for re-training?

(d) Does he want to develop a leisure interest or to initiate a new one?

(e) Is his desire to study linked to a need to keep pace with and help with the study his children are pursuing?

By talking to the student in a friendly and relaxed manner, remembering that many students are apprehensive and unsure of themselves in what may be to them quite a new situation, the tutor does his best to draw out and clarify the student's wants and aims.

5.3. ASSESSING THE STUDENT'S ABILITIES

The next step is to attempt to gauge the student's likely level of ability in order that a suitable course can be recommended. This is of considerable importance. The student who finds himself faced with material that is too easy for his requirements, will probably have the confidence to return and request a change of course but the student who is confronted from the outset with work beyond his comprehension is quite likely to give up before he has even started. (For the importance of 'understanding' see Unit 1, Section 4.4.). Moreover the tutor will find it helpful to have an early indication of whether a student is likely to cope well when left to his own resources or conversely is going to need a fair amount of encouragement and support in the early stages of a course.

There is sometimes a tendency to talk rather glibly about assessing student 'needs' but it must be admitted that the tutor's task in this respect is often a complex one, requiring a considerable degree of tact and understanding. If, for example, the student has set his heart on an advanced course for which he is clearly unprepared, it may be necessary to convince him that a lower level course is more likely, in the long run, to help him fulfil his wishes and aims.

Some learning materials include a diagnostic test that the student can attempt before committing himself to a particular course of study. If such a test is not available it may be possible to devise something similar that is appropriate to the subject in question. (e.g. A brief verbal exercise; a short passage to read and comment on; a simple task to perform etc.). In addition the tutor will need answers to questions of the following kind:

(a) What experience, practical and theoretical, of the subject does the student have?

(b) Does this include any formal qualification?

(c) How recently was the experience/qualification obtained?

(d) Is there recent experience of formal education or is a return to study after a long absence envisaged?

(e) Is there any prior experience of working alone?

(f) Does the student have relevant study skills? (e.g. Is he familiar with the techniques involved in note-taking; using libraries and text-books; revising; essay writing etc.).

5.4. RECOMMENDING THE LEARNING MATERIAL

At this point it may well be possible to agree on a course of study and appropriate learning material that both tutor and student find acceptable. If however agreement is not reached the tutor has at least three options. He can:

(a) Offer to adapt a course to the student's requirements with the possible stipulation that additional tutorial contact may be necessary in the early stages.

(b) Suggest a lower level, remedial or beginner's course.

(c) Suggest that the student starts his study with one of the preparatory courses available that aim to ease students back into formal education, by giving practical help with essay writing and study skills.

As a last resort, if agreement seems impossible, the tutor should always refer the matter back to the organisational staff for further consideration and attention.

5.5. PLANNING TOGETHER A LEARNING STRATEGY

You may well feel that sufficient tasks have now been suggested to exhaust the limits of a first meeting. The open learning tutor however soon learns the necessity of making full use of every minute of contact time and in those cases where appropriate learning material has been decided upon, this is an ideal time to set about planning with the student a realistic frame-work of study. A glance back at the problems discussed in Unit 1 (e.g. the student's need for self-discipline; for feedback and reinforcement; the difficulty of sustaining motivation when working alone) will provide ample reason for early and careful planning, carried out in close conjunction with the student.

When class-teaching is under discussion the advantages and disadvantages of student participation in course planning are sometimes debated. In open learning where the student is of necessity expected to take a greater degree of responsibility for his own progress, such participation is essential and in consequence the overall intention will be to devise, in the light of mutually agreed aims and objectives, a strategy which will set the student firmly on a course of relatively independent study.

Once again a considerable degree of tact and empathy is called for on the part of the tutor; even mature students can be surprisingly diffident when faced with a return to study and may well need the reassurance and security that a sympathetic tutor and an efficient organisation can provide. The plan of action will vary according to the subject matter to be tackled, wood-carving clearly requires a different strategy to the learning of Russian, but there are a number of matters that every tutor will need to clarify in the light of a realistic appraisal of time and facilities available.

For example he will need to establish that:

(a) The student understands the working of the system, including the acquisition of learning materials and the payment of fees. In OWTLET the student is billed for all tutor contact (the first two hours of which are paid for in advance) including the marking of assignments, telephone calls etc., and needs to be fully conversant with this procedure from the beginning.

(b) The student understands how the tutor fits into the scheme. (See Unit 1, Section 5 for the role of the tutor in open learning.) For example: How, where and when he can be contacted by the student. Experience in open learning has shown that almost all students are reluctant 'to bother' their tutors and a firm: "between 6 and 7 pm on Monday evenings" or

even "the first Tuesday evening of the month before 9 pm" although it may sound unduly limited is more likely to evoke a positive response, than a vague invitation to "ring me any time". There is the added advantage that the tutor can then anticipate a call and have the necessary records and papers ready to hand. The tutor should also establish how, where and when the student can be contacted. In OWTLET the tutor is encouraged to contact students who have failed to keep in touch at regular pre-arranged times throughout the year.

(c) The student has some idea how best to utilise his study time. (e.g. A regular period of study, even if short, pays greater dividends than very widely spaced periods of over-intensive effort.)

(d) The student has a clear overall conception of the course and what it can help him to achieve.

(e) The student realises the importance of working steadily through the material step-by-step, tackling exercises and questions as they arise. A systematic approach always works better than an erratic, spasmodic sampling of the material and is less likely to end in disillusionment and failure.

(f) The student has details of any materials that may be needed. (e.g. An A4 folder; a tape recorder; work-tools etc.) Tutors of subjects requiring practical facilities (e.g. science and craft subjects) must be sure both that arrangements for suitable facilities exist and that these fit in with the times that the student is available.

(g) The student has some idea of how assignments, projects etc., should be presented and the sort of marking to expect. (e.g. Will the tutor give grades and if so what do these indicate?) It may be a good idea here to warn the student that whilst a high standard will be set from the start, he should on no account feel intimidated or discouraged if his early efforts are less than fully successful.

(h) The student has a clear indication of his immediate objectives for the next few weeks, together with an agreed deadline for the submission of a first piece of work to the tutor.

It would be difficult to over-emphasise the importance of this first short-term objective, culminating in contact with the tutor. Motivation is best sustained when the student is working towards a clearly defined short-term goal, which will provide the occasion for feedback on performance, reinforcement of effort and an opportunity for the tutor to diagnose problems and any possible lack of understanding of the learning material. The knowledge

that contact with the tutor is planned in advance and can be looked forward to within a reasonable time, also helps to establish from the very beginning the type of working relationship that can obviate the feeling of isolation which is the least fortunate aspect of open learning. The form that the contact can most usefully take will rest on the nature of the subject matter involved. Practical work may well require a short face-to-face meeting, in order that the tutor can inspect work done. For academic subjects, contact at this time, may more conveniently take the form of a written assignment or audio cassette for the tutor's attention.

When careful preparation, including due attention to the matters suggested above, is carried through, there is every chance that the initial meeting will end with a student successfully launched on a rewarding course of study, an end that will amply justify the considerable thought and care devoted by the tutor to this important opening phase of an open learning tutor-student relationship.

QUESTION 5

With your own subject in mind try to outline in your note book a plan of action for a first meeting with a potential open learning student.

DISCUSSION

Answers will vary in accordance with the subjects to be studied but all answers should give some attention to the following essential points:

The aim of the meeting is to assess the student's needs and abilities and where possible to recommend learning material and prepare a mutually agreed scheme of study. For this purpose the tutor will need to discover why the student wishes to study and what level of work he is capable of tackling. Where a suitable course of study and appropriate learning material are successfully agreed the tutor should ensure that the student is fully conversant with all aspects of the scheme, has a clear overall concept of the course and is fully prepared to start working towards a clearly defined mutually agreed objective, which will culminate in renewed contact with the tutor.

6.0. CONCLUSION

In Unit 1 it was suggested that whilst the open learning tutor must relinquish the traditional class-room duty of acting as the primary source of information for students, his overall responsibility - the creation of conditions in which learning is most likely to occur - remains unchanged.

Unit 2 has looked at:

(a) The vital part that structured learning material plays in the creation of those necessary conditions for learning.

(b) Techniques that can be employed in an effort to bring about an effective match between the individual student and available learning materials.

(c) Ways in which the material may need to be supplemented, modified and supported by the tutor.

(d) The initial procedures that can best be followed in order to establish the tutor-student relationship on a firm and mutually rewarding base.

In Unit 3 we will move on to look at ways in which tutor and student can build on that foundation by entering into and sustaining an effective dialogue, which will provide a framework within which the tutor can carry out his tasks of supervising, monitoring and assessing the student's continuing progress.

OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

UNIT THREE

A CONTINUING DIALOGUE

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EVALUATION OF LEARNING MATERIALS

Open Learning in Further Education

When you have completed work on the Unit please answer the following questions. They are in no way intended as an assessment of your performance but your answers will be invaluable in helping us to evaluate the effectiveness of the material. It would be a good idea to make a note of the time whenever you start studying the material and again when you stop.

1 What was the total time spent working on the Unit?

2 How long (roughly) did you take over the Questions incorporated in the Unit?

3 How difficult did you find the material as a whole? Very difficult; fairly difficult; about right; fairly easy; very easy (please tick as appropriate).

4 Which section(s) (if any) did you find most difficult? least difficult?
Please try to indicate why.

5 How interesting did you find the material as a whole? very interesting; fairly interesting; not at all interesting. (please tick as appropriate).

6 Which section(s) (if any) did you find most interesting? least interesting?
Please try to indicate why.

7 How useful did you find the material as a whole? very useful; fairly useful; not at all useful.

8 Which section(s) (if any) did you find most useful? least useful?
Please try to indicate why.

We would be extremely glad of any other comments you may care to make on any aspect of the material.

CONTENTS

		Page
1.	Aim and Objectives	65
2.	Study Guide	66
2.	Written Work (6.3)	67
4.	The use of Telephone and Oral Cassette (6.2)	79
5.	Face-to-face Contact (2.3)	84
6.	Keeping Student Records	90
7.	Conclusion	93
8.	Assignment	94

Numbers in brackets refer to relevant sections of the City and Guilds 730 Syllabus.

1.0. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to encourage student teachers to consider ways in which an effective dialogue can be developed between open learning tutor and student.

When you have completed it you should be able to:

A. Describe the important part played by the marking of work as part of a continuing process of communication.

B. Outline the part that telephone and oral cassette can play as contributory media in a continuous student-tutor dialogue.

C. Indicate in relation to your own subject how limited face-to-face contact can best be utilized.

D. Recognize the importance of record keeping.

2.0. STUDY GUIDE

First make sure that you have retained a grasp of the argument so far presented, by carrying out a quick review of the material to date. You might like to do this by glancing down the list of Objectives on page three of Units One and Two, jotting down skeleton answers as you go and referring to the main body of the text only if and when your memory fails. Finally quickly re-read the conclusion to Unit Two.

So far it has been possible to talk to you in very general terms applicable across the very wide range of subject areas with which teachers are concerned. As we move into a discussion of ways of maintaining tutor-student contact, this generality will be more difficult to sustain since the diverse strategies demanded by different subjects play an increasingly determining part in tutor-student interaction. For example, whilst marking written work is a vital ingredient in the teaching of the Humanities and Social Sciences, that activity may play a minor role in the teaching of Crafts.

From now on, keep your own subject in mind and ask yourself how the matters discussed can be fruitfully applied. Be selective in the amount of time devoted to the various sections, giving precedence to those most clearly related to your own subject, but do not ignore any parts of the Unit because all are relevant to the City & Guilds 730 Course, especially to that important area of your syllabus devoted to Communication.

The questions in this Unit are open-ended, intended to start you thinking rather than to enable you to assess whether you have assimilated the information presented. Nevertheless you should continue to attempt an answer to each one before reading the text that follows.

At the end of the Unit you will find details of a written assignment, check with your Course Tutor whether you are required to carry out this exercise, before preparing your answer and submitting it for comment and advice.

3.0. WRITTEN WORK (Objective A)

In many subject areas the first and most frequent student-tutor interaction will be by means of written exercises passed through the post for correction and comment and most learning material includes assignments to be treated in this way. (See Unit Two 4.0. vi.) Consider for a moment why this should be so.

Self-instructional materials (e.g. written texts and oral cassettes) are well able to perform the task of exposition usually carried out in the classroom. There are indeed clear advantages over the traditional classroom lecture, which makes little allowance for the shortness and variability of the individual's attention span. The open learner on the other hand, can work at his own pace and if necessary go back over material not grasped on a first reading. Moreover the conventional classroom lecture tends to treat students as passive recipients of information whereas the inclusion of self-assessment activities can encourage the open learner to become actively involved in his work, to monitor his own progress and to receive regular feedback. On the other hand as you will have discovered from working on these Units, self-assessment questions are limited in what they can do. They must of necessity be restricted to factual questions that have relatively straightforward, unambiguous answers. They make little allowance for the possibility that there is more than one way of tackling a question and offer little incentive and encouragement for the very necessary activity of thinking beyond and around the text and of questioning its assumptions. In addition, self-assessment demands a high level of self-discipline and maturity. Not only must the student resist a very human temptation to look at the answers before making a thorough attempt at finding his own solution but to be really effective self-assessment demands that the student spends time expressing his answers clearly in writing, although no-one but himself will see the results of this labour.

It is for reasons such as these, that open learning acknowledges the need for regular open-ended assignments to be tackled and passed to tutors in order that a student's achievements may be assessed by an external agent in an objective and unbiased way.

QUESTION 1

Can you think of at least one more reason why written assignments play a vital part in much open learning?

DISCUSSION

I do not know what you have replied and thus cannot comment on the validity of your answers but here are some more reasons that seem to me important.

a. Assignments supply a vital motivating ingredient. If the student knows that he has to do an exercise for his tutor he is more likely to get on with the required course work. This is particularly so if a 'dead-line' for the assignment is stipulated. (See Unit Two 5.5 h. and following paragraph)

b. Assignments enable the tutor to diagnose learning problems as they arise.

c. Assignments can encourage the student to explore the subject for himself and can discourage too great a dependency upon the 'official' text.

d. Assignments provide an opportunity for the application and generalisation of acquired knowledge to a variety of contexts and circumstances.

e. Progress in a discipline involves not just answering questions but in learning to formulate questions for oneself. Assignments can be directed towards ascertaining not so much whether students can come up with the right answers, but whether they are also acquiring the ability to ask the right questions.

3.1 MARKING WRITTEN WORK

The student carries out his assignment, posts the completed work to the tutor, who enters into the dialogue by marking and commenting on the script, before posting it back to the student. Every tutor will have his own individual approach to the task of marking scripts but the unusual structure of open learning necessitates the observance of certain general rules.

The tutor needs to bear in mind that the open learner lacks the immediate support offered by the class in conventional systems. In particular the student is unlikely to have the opportunity to discuss his work before and after completion with his tutor and is even more unlikely to be able to compare ideas and results with fellow students. Consequently the student, especially in the early stages of a course, may approach written assignments with some trepidation and may devote an inordinate amount of time, thought and effort to the task. Experience shows that this is particularly likely to be so in the case of the mature student, returning to study after a long absence, since here anxiety is compounded by a lack of self-confidence engendered by the unfamiliarity of the task in hand. A student in this position quite literally does not know what is expected of him.

Thus the open learning tutor will need to observe four basic rules:

a. All assignments must be marked and returned to the student as quickly as possible in order to maximise the effectiveness of feedback and reinforcement. (See Unit One 4.2. et seq.)

b. If the student is to learn from his efforts, marks and comments must be full and constructive. Strengths should be identified and reinforced, weakenesses and errors should be diagnosed, together with explanations as to how these faults can be corrected and work improved.

c. As the course proceeds the tutor should indicate how current work relates to the course as a whole, how it builds on past achievement and prepares the way for work to come. (See Unit One 4.4.) He should also from time to time, let the student know how successfully course objectives are being achieved.

d. Finally the tutor should bear in mind that assignments can facilitate a rewarding tutor-student relationship, if a warm supporting interest is conveyed, helping the student to view the written exchange as part of a friendly ongoing dialogue.

Stating the above rules is an easy matter, putting them into practice effectively is an altogether more difficult and demanding task.

QUESTION 2

The marking of assignments can be a vital form of contact between tutor and student yet at the same time one that presents its own particular difficulties.

Can you suggest one or two reasons why the written word is not always fully effective as a medium of communication and in particular why it may lend itself rather easily to misunderstanding?

DISCUSSION

One reason why the written word often fails to communicate the writer's full intention and can only too easily be misunderstood is precisely because it has the virtue of being able to operate from a distance and can take the place of face-to-face interaction.

Speech unlike written communication is accompanied by a multitude of subtle non-verbal indicators (e.g. emphasis, tone, pitch, gesture, facial expression etc.) that contribute to the meaning of our utterances by modifying and supplementing the words that we use. Moreover the speaker in a face-to-face interaction can count upon immediate feedback from the recipient of his message. Communication in such circumstances is dynamic, information flowing backwards and forwards, both persons modifying their messages in accordance with the other's reaction.

The written word on the other hand stands alone and must convey the sender's meaning without extraneous help and in the absence of immediate feedback. Thus a written message, unlike a spoken one, cannot be quickly explained, or retracted, or modified, or augmented, or even softened by smile and gesture, in the light of the recipient's response.

This characteristic of the written word is particularly relevant to item 3.1. d. above, since at first many tutors find it difficult to convey in writing a 'tone of voice' that is warm and friendly but which at the same time does not hint at patronage or condescension which are two qualities particularly disliked by adult students.

There is however little doubt that the empathy that this ability requires, the knack of getting inside the other person's skin, is one that comes more easily when tutor and student have previously met and conversed together. This is one reason why the initial contact should whenever possible be face-to-face. (See Unit Two 5.0.)

3.2. CREATING A WRITTEN DIALOGUE

The art of marking assignments is one that develops with practice and experience but there are some guidelines that can come to our aid.

a. Write legibly. This should perhaps go without saying, yet a surprising number of individuals who may be quick to complain of difficulty experienced in trying to read their students' handwriting, are less than meticulous about the legibility of their own.

b. Remember that a script liberally adorned with red ink is disheartening for the student and difficult to decipher. A more satisfactory practice may be to restrict textual marking to simple corrections (if there are many of these a pencil may be less intimidating than red ink!) and to list longer comments and explanations on a separate sheet, carefully cross-referenced to the margins of the assignment.

c. Always look for something to praise. A student working in isolation badly needs the reinforcement and boost in confidence that comes from generous encouragement.

d. Let the student know that you have enjoyed reading his script. Ideally he should feel that you are exploring the subject together, rather than that the tutor is merely sitting in judgement upon him.

e. In the early stages of a course, if a student is clearly struggling, concentrate on one or two weaknesses at a time. When explaining how errors can be corrected give plenty of examples and make an effort to relate the work to the student's personal experience.

f. Always remember that the 'good' student needs a fair share of attention too. If he is to develop his own powers of judgement, knowing why work is 'good' is as important as knowing why it is 'bad'.

g. Finally, many tutors like to conclude with one or two questions related to the assignment topic but aimed at encouraging the student to reply informally.

All in all this is a formidable list to think about but well worth while if the end result is to transform the writing of assignments from a task that the student dreads, into a fruitful and rewarding dialogue. There is little doubt that we learn more easily and more efficiently when we enjoy and get satisfaction from the task in hand.

3.3. TO GRADE OR NOT TO GRADE

On the whole students expect to receive marks or grades for their work and even request them if they are not given. Tutors on the other hand are often less happy about the practice perhaps because they see more clearly that grades, whilst giving the appearance of objectivity, can at the same time be arbitrary and misleading. This is undoubtedly the case when there is no clear indication of what the grades represent. Do they measure:

a. The student's present work against the work he has submitted in the past?

b. The student's work against the work of other students, whom he does not know and is unlikely to meet?

c. The student's work against some hypothetical required standard?

On the credit side, when questions of measurement and standard have been satisfactorily answered, grades, if consistently awarded, can enable to tutor and student to keep a convenient, easily referred to, record of how the work is going.

Grades should however never be used as an excuse for impoverished marking. In open learning, a grade - even a good one - is never a satisfactory substitute for plenty of explanation and encouragement.

If grades are awarded the student should be given a very clear idea of the basis on which the assessment is made. The long term aim of teaching is to produce independent learners, capable in time of assessing their own progress and achievements. With this in mind marking can be looked upon as a good opportunity to help students to look at their work critically and to develop their own powers of judgement and discrimination.

One way of achieving consistent marking and of explaining to the student the processes involved is to work out a series of bench marks in the form of a grading schedule. You might like to consider the form reproduced on the next page which could perhaps be adapted to suit your own requirements. This is a schedule suggested by McDonald R., and Sansom D., in their article 'Use of Assignment Attachments in Assessment' in Assessment in Higher Education Vol.5 No1 December 1979.

If possible try also to take a look at an extremely useful publication:

Lewis, Roger (1981) HOW TO TUTOR IN AN OPEN LEARNING SCHEME CET

Here you will find practising tutors sharing their ideas on all aspects of open learning, together with many quoted examples of actual assignment comments. These demonstrate very vividly the many ways in which tutors seek to use the assignment as a means of establishing a satisfying tutor-student relationship.

GRADING SCHEDULE

	Rating Scale (ticked when applicable)	
STRUCTURE		
Essay relevant to topic Topic covered in depth		Essay has little relevance Superficial treatment of topic
ARGUMENT		
Accurate presentation of evidence Logically developed argument Original and creative thought		Much evidence inaccurate or questionable Essay rambles and lacks continuity Little evidence of originality
STYLE		
Fluent piece of writing Succinct writing		Clumsily written Unnecessarily repetitive
PRESENTATION		
Legible and well set out work Reasonable length		Untidy and difficult to read Over/under length
SOURCES		
Adequate acknowledgement of sources Correct citation of references		Inadequate acknowledgement of sources Incorrect referencing
MECHANICS		
Grammatical sentences Correct spelling throughout Effective use of figures and tables Correct use of units and quantities		Several ungrammatical sentences Much incorrect spelling Figures and tables add little to argument Some units incorrect

A tick in the left-hand box means that the statement on the left is true: a tick in the second box from the left means that the statment on the left is true to some extent. Similarly for the right-hand boxes e.g.

Topic covered in depth			✓		Superficial treatment of topic

means that the topic was treated somewhat superficially in the assignment.

QUESTION 3

In what ways do you think the telephone and the oral cassette might contribute to tutor-student contact in open learning? Jot down any possibilities that occur to you, together with a note of the advantages and disadvantages of the communication medium in question. Then compare your ideas with mine as set out in the section that follows.

4.0. THE USE OF TELEPHONE AND ORAL CASSETTE (Objective B)

4.1. CONTACT BY TELEPHONE

If we compare telephoning with writing we can see at once that the medium possesses both strengths and weaknesses.

Disadvantages

- not always available. Everyone has access to pen and paper, not everyone possesses a telephone.
- not always convenient. Most of us know how irritating a badly timed call can be, which is a good reason for building telephone contact into the relationship from the beginning. (See Unit Two 5.5. b.)
- no permanent record, unless adequate notes are taken and that can be difficult whilst telephoning.
- expensive. Perhaps, although if tutor and student agree to keep things snappy and to make use of cheap rates, this need not be a major consideration and most schemes recognize the need to reimburse tutors for the cost of telephone contact.

Advantages

- more personal than writing, so potentially warmer and friendlier, although perhaps only when the participants have previously met each other since disembodied voices can be disconcerting. Note that we are back again to the need for the first meeting to be on a face-to-face basis.
- quicker, since most of us can say what we have to say more quickly than we can write it down.
- less delay, since letters take time to pass through the post.
- provides immediate feedback in the form of the other's verbal response, so less chance of misunderstanding.

On balance then we can say that whilst the telephone cannot replace the written word, when available, there is certainly a useful place for it in tutor-student contact. Perhaps the greatest strength of the telephone lies in the contribution it can make towards reducing student isolation, a factor we continually return to in these discussions. Indeed all of the points that follow relate closely to the problems of the open learner identified in Unit One and this would be a good moment to re-read Section 4 of that Unit.

The telephone comes into its own particularly at those moments when the student is liable to be under stress. For example:

a. Before the submission of assignments, especially the first assignment, which is almost always a source of considerable worry to students.

b. After the return of marked assignments. Many tutors like to make a brief follow-up call to check that students have understood their comments and perhaps, if a very low grade has been awarded, to administer a timely boost to morale.

c. Before and after sitting examinations. These are obviously times when students will value the chance to talk to an understanding and sympathetic adviser. Incidentally it is not so generally appreciated that the student may also be desperate for someone to talk to when those examination results finally arrive.

The second major contribution the telephone can make, relates to the great importance of 'understanding' in the learning process. Here the initiative can come in either direction. The student who has come to a halt in his studies because he just cannot understand the work in front of him, may find that even a brief telephone call to the tutor can clear the difficulty quickly and get him safely under way once again. Conversely the tutor may diagnose a lack of understanding that cannot be cleared up by a few lines of explanation on an assignment sheet. In these circumstances ringing the student may prove an invaluable aid to clarifying the problem quickly and efficiently.

The third and final contribution (although you may well have thought of some more good ones)is relevant to the importance of sustaining the student's will to learn, since evidence* suggests that individuals find regular telephone contact a major help in keeping their motivation from flagging. This seems to be particularly true of the period about half-way through a course of study, when the initial novelty has waned and the end still seems a long way off.

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* Lewis, R. Counselling in Open Learning (1980) NEC Report

4.2. TELEPHONE TUTORIALS

A rather different use of the telephone from the brief calls discussed above comes into action when there are difficulties that prohibit tutor and student from meeting, even on an occasional basis. In these circumstances it is sometimes possible for short individual tutorials to be conducted over the phone. The major point to remember is the need for careful planning, initiated by the tutor and agreed with the student by letter, well in advance of the tutorial. I have in mind such things as:

a. A mutually convenient date, time and length of call.

b. A topic that can be successfully dealt with on the telephone.

c. Careful prior preparation, by both tutor and student of the topic to be discussed.

d. Having everything likely to be required during the call (e.g. notes, records etc.) immediately to hand.

It would be misleading however to imply that a telephone tutorial can easily replace the effectiveness of a face-to-face meeting. In practice both tutors and students tend to approach them with some nervousness and to use the tutorial by telephone only as a last resort.

Mistrust of this form of tutorial probably arises from the difficulty we all experience in handling periods of silence on the telephone. Think for a moment how disconcerting, when telephoning, even a few moments of silence can be, leading to cries of - "are you there?" "have we been cut off?" - and you will see what I mean.

Because in this medium of communication, visual cues are entirely lacking, there is a tendency to feel that a continuous flow of dialogue must be maintained at all costs. But such a practice is of course entirely at odds with a well-conducted tutorial, which requires moments of silence in order that participants may think about the topic in hand, together with pauses for the taking of notes etc.

Like all unfamiliar techniques the telephone tutorial is something that needs working at and performance can certainly improve with practice, often giving good results in those situations (e.g. geographical isolation) where circumstances make contact of this kind a necessity.

4.3. CONTACT BY ORAL CASSETTE

Although the oral cassette plays a lively part in much open learning material and a decisive role in the teaching of languages, comparatively few tutors make use of it as a way of maintaining regular contact with students. This is perhaps surprising, since the oral cassette shares with the telephone the virtue of speed of delivery and possesses the possibility of conveying a greater sense of an individual, personal presence than is the case with the written word.

On the debit side of the account, the cassette is inevitably a one-sided process lacking the immediate verbal feedback of the telephone conversation and this may go some way towards explaining the relative neglect of its use. There is some evidence however that those tutors and students who have acquired the habit of communicating in this way are happy with the practice and it seems likely that the oral cassette is a device that more participators in open learning, could usefully exploit as a valuable supplement to the written word.

To conclude, there is no doubt that the greater the degree of 'distance' existing within a specific open learning relationship, the more enterprising the tutor needs to be in utilizing all available communication media in order to sustain a viable dialogue with the student. Usually however it is also possible for tutor and student to meet occasionally, either in group or individual tutorials and it is these periods of face-to-face interaction, either at home or college, that we will now consider.

QUESTION 4

On page 9 of Unit Two you will find a list of functions which are traditionally carried out in the classroom, but which self-instructional learning material can successfully fulfil. Refresh your memory of these, then with your own subject in mind write down those classroom activities (i.e. Methods of Teaching) you feel CANNOT be accomplished by self-study learning materials.

One way to do this is to take a scheme of work, or perhaps a particular lesson plan that you have recently prepared. Ask yourself: which of the scheduled activities could be successfully undertaken by a student working independently, with the help of learning materials as described in Unit Two and which, if any, could not be carried out in that way.

Teachers new to the concept of open learning tend to assume that all learning requires their active presence. But give the question careful thought, bearing in mind the full range of aids available and make an honest appraisal of those objectives that do not need a teacher's presence and conversely those that do necessitate direct contact between tutor and student.

It is with these latter functions that we will be concerned in the next section. The open learning tutor needs to clarify their nature and to have them constantly in mind when planning the use of necessarily limited tutorial time.

5.0. FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT (Objective C)

It is explicit in the concept of open learning as defined in these Units that face-to-face contact between student and tutor, occurs less frequently than is the case in traditional educational systems. Careful planning can help the tutor make the fullest and most economical use of the interaction that does occur and once again there are some general guidelines that can be usefully observed. The open learning tutor should:

a. Agree with the student in advance of the tutorial the topics to be covered in order that time will not be wasted by a lack of preparation on either side.

b. Plan the allocation of time but be prepared to be completely flexible in the light of the student's needs.

c. Avoid duplicating those functions performed adequately by the learning material and in particular assiduously avoid any temptation to lecture. (See 3.0. above)

d. Remember that this is an ideal time for sorting out learning problems, for giving study guidance of a general nature and for anticipating difficulties that future work may present.

e. Take the opportunity to communicate enthusiasm for the subject in order to stimulate the student's interest and activate motivation.

5.1. DEMONSTRATION

The verbal text is not well suited to this important teaching method, illustration and diagram can go some way towards filling the gap, but until the day comes when video is a commonplace in every home, courses of a highly practical nature can only operate in an open learning form, when the possibility exists for a reasonable amount of face-to-face contact. Tutorial time can then be devoted to

- demonstrating skills and techniques, perhaps making use of college audio visual aids.

- giving the student the opportunity to practise under the eye of an expert.

- enabling the individual to view critically his own efforts in the context of the work of other students, in order to develop powers of judgement and discrimination.

- monitoring and assessing students' progress.

To a considerable extent the fact that tutorials occur less frequently in open learning can be successfully offset by applying more favourable teacher-student ratios (sometimes one-to-one) than are possible in traditional systems.

Demonstration may also be thought of in a much wider sense, as the instructional mode that brings the student into actual contact with objects and events instead of relying upon verbal communication about them. When we speak of demonstration in this way it is clear that the method is by no means applicable only to practical subjects, since even the most theoretical of disciplines can make use of it in order to avoid excessive verbalisation. This is achieved by ensuring that the new concepts to be acquired by students are soundly based upon observation of concrete objects and events or are linked to actual situations. Case studies, field trips, films, role-play, video-cassettes, can all play a valuable part in this process.

Thus in all subjects, when planning a face-to-face tutorial, the open learning tutor needs to consider carefully the merits of taking this opportunity of incorporating into the student's work an element of demonstration, making use where applicable of any available audio visual aids.

5.2. LABORATORY AND WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

Those subjects that involve students in a certain amount of laboratory or workshop experience present particular problems for open learning since they often necessitate the use of expensive and potentially dangerous equipment relying not only on the presence of a tutor but also on technician support.

Consequently this type of course is not commonly found within open learning provision, although there are indications that an increasing number of institutions are experimenting with a wide variety of ways of making the inclusion of such subjects a workable proposition.

5.3. DISCUSSION

The third major teaching strategy that cannot be accomplished by the use of learning materials alone is discussion. This method is unusual in that its primary aim is not the transmission of information. Indeed discussion as an instructional mode, assumes that the required knowledge has already been attained, its purpose being to search out the implications of that prior learning and to encourage students to put it to use in a variety of contexts. Thus a discussion often begins by the introduction of a novel problem, perhaps by the presentation of a case study or by the enactment of a role-play or simply by asking a carefully formulated question. It is important that the problem presented is one that is related to but not previously met with in prior learning.

The intention of the ensuing discussion is to give students an opportunity to practise generalising and transferring acquired knowledge to new situations. At the same time the discussion provides a public forum for the critical evaluation and discrimination of the ideas that emerge.

Once knowledge has been acquired it needs to be put to use in as great a variety of new situations as can be devised. In the open learning tutorial, discussion can play a vital part in encouraging students to apply the knowledge they have acquired in private study. It should aim at stretching the imagination and encouraging originality within a public context which offers both stimulation and support.

Discussion then, is of value to the student, because knowledge transfer - "the refinement, qualification and elaboration of acquired knowledge" (Gagne 1965) - is a process best achieved by interaction between people. The learning of a foreign language offers one example of this process in operation. Students working alone with texts and cassettes can accumulate a fair degree of knowledge of a language. They will however only become competent speakers, if the opportunity exists for them to use that language in conversation with others.

Ideally, discussion as a method, involves interaction between peers, but it can quite happily be adapted to the individual tutorial, as long as the tutor avoids dominating the proceedings and truly engages with the student in a mutual act of exploration and discovery.

When discussion is successfully incorporated into the open learning tutorial, other more general functions are fulfilled. The tutor gains a deeper insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the students and can more readily assess how well the aims and

objectives of the course are being met. The student's motivation to achieve - the satisfaction of being able to do something as a result of studying - is strengthened. And finally, discussion can administer a highly effective boost to morale since the method is probably the perfect vehicle for communicating a sense of delight and enthusiasm for the subject being studied.

5.4. GROUP TUTORIALS

The opportunity for bringing small groups of students together often arises in open learning. The practice of holding group tutorials, is at its most straightforward in those systems (e.g. the Open University) that structure courses and carefully pace students through the year, so that at any given time all are at the same stage in their studies. Evening seminars, day or week long summer schools can then be held that provide students with an intensive experience of those elements lacking in private study, for example:

- Student interaction
- Field trips
- Demonstration
- Group Discussion
- Laboratory practice, etc.

Schemes that do not pace students but encourage them to commence their studies at any time in the year and then to proceed at their own speed are in a rather more difficult position when it comes to group tutorials.

However, adult students are rich repositories of experience and can learn a great deal from each other, even if at different stages in their studies. Thus there is much to be said for the occasional group tutorial when circumstances make this possible. The tutor will typically act as organiser and facilitator, his aim being, for example:

- To foster the sense of a group identity
- To encourage the emergence of student self-help groups
- To instigate discussion
- To promote problem solving
- To stimulate enthusiasm, etc.

I wonder how many of the functions you listed in answer to question 4 have been touched upon in this section. If there are areas you feel are important, that seem to have been disregarded or neglected try to find an opportunity for discussing them with your tutor and fellow students. There will also be an opportunity to explore these matters in the assignment that concludes the work in this Unit.

6.0. KEEPING STUDENT RECORDS

The keeping of records may seem a mundane matter on which to conclude a discussion of tutor-student interaction, but the importance of the task can scarcely be over estimated. In open learning students are out of sight a great deal of the time, only meticulous record keeping can fully ensure that they are not also out of mind. The tutor is the linchpin of open learning: the liaison point for both student and college. The records he keeps should reflect this dual responsibility.

In the early stages of an enrolment, college and tutor need to work very closely in the building up of an initial student profile that records details such as:

- enrolment date
- educational background
- occupation
- learning materials issued
- target examination date, if appropriate
- motivational factors
- sources of potential difficulty, if any.

Once the student is under way with a course of study the tutor becomes responsible for feeding the College with information that will enable this profile to be developed and maintained.

QUESTION 5

If you were an open learning tutor what details would you aim to keep a note of when compiling student records? Try to give reasons for your choice, then compare your ideas with my suggestions overleaf.

6.1. WHAT SHOULD BE RECORDED?

a. Dates of all communications - telephone as well as letters - with some indication of what was said. Feedback from students is particularly important for evaluation of all aspects of the scheme and its educational effectiveness.

b. Dates of tutorial contact, both individual and group.

c. Dates of assignments, together with grades awarded and comments made. Many tutors like to keep a carbon copy of grades and comments for quick reference when marking and telephoning.

d. Details of examination entries and results. These are important guides. They help monitor how well the scheme is working and indicate ways in which it might be improved.

e. Date of conclusion of course or withdrawal from study, together with reasons for withdrawal. These details may also offer important pointers for evaluation purposes.

6.2. WHY ARE RECORDS NECESSARY?

a. To keep a check on the student's progress and achievements.

b. To anticipate problems in order to take remedial action and forestall possible drop-out.

c. To maintain and monitor a regular pattern of contact.

d. To ensure that the tutor is paid for all student contact.

e. To build up the student's confidence. The tutor who shows by his actions that he knows exactly where the individual student has got to in his studies, demonstrates his interest in that student and is much more likely to gain his trust as a consequence.

f. To facilitate examination arrangements.

g. To enable the scheme to be consistently evaluated in order that standards may be maintained and improvements made.

7.0. CONCLUSION

Open learning seeks to make more flexible an educational provision which in its traditional form has proved inaccessible to a large number of potential students. To a considerable extent, the loosening of constraints that this entails, has been made possible by the development of learning materials designed to be studied by the student as an individual rather than as a member of a class. As a result, the open learning tutor ceases to be the primary source of information for his students. He sees them less regularly and for shorter periods than is customary in traditional education. However the tutor's primary role - overall responsibility for the creation of those conditions in which student learning is most likely to occur - remains unchanged.

In order to fulfil this role in the modified circumstances of open learning the tutor needs to become sensitive to the learning problems that the open learner is likely to experience. It is also important that the tutor develops a working knowledge of both the strengths and the limitations of the learning materials he is required to support. When these fundamental requirements are met, the tutor is in a good position to establish and to sustain by a variety of means the tutor-student dialogue which is the life blood of open learning.

In this short course I have tried to maintain a balance between a realistic appraisal of the problems inherent in open learning and an assessment of how these may be effectively overcome. If you are now, or in the future, involved in open learning, I very much hope that working through these pages will help to make the experience a successful and enjoyable one.

ASSIGNMENT FOR TUTOR MARKING

Imagine that you have been asked to advise on the practicality of developing an open learning course for the subject that you teach.

Write about 1,000 words covering the following:-

1. A reasoned appraisal of arguments for and against the suggestion. (See Unit One).

2. An assessment of:

   a. Aspects of the course which could be covered effectively by learning materials.

   b. Those aspects which would entail tutor-student contact. (See Units Two and Three).

3. Suggestions for the form that the learning material could most usefully take - assume that it may be possible to utilise up-to-date learning resources. (See Unit Two).

4. Recommendations for the type and amount of student-tutor interaction that would be required. (See Unit Three).

APPENDIX B

FURTHER READING

Davies, TC — Open Learning Systems for Mature Students Council for Educational Technology Working Paper 14, CET, 1977

Davies, WJK — Alternatives to Class Teaching in Schools and Colleges Council for Educational Technology Guideline 9, CET, 1980

Lewis, R — Case Study in Counselling in Open Learning National Extension College Report Series 2, No 6, NEC, 1980

Lewis, R — How to Tutor in an Open Learning Scheme: Group Study Version/Self-Study Version CET, 1981

Open University — Teaching at a Distance

Osborn, M Charnley, A and Withnall, A — Education, Information, Advice and Counselling for Adults Vol. 6

Spencer, DC — Thinking About Open Learning Systems Council for Educational Technology Working Paper 19, CET, 1980

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Objectives

The objects for which The Further Education Unit (FEU) is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:
a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;
b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvements can be effected;
c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiative in further education;
d) to disseminate and publish information and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.